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ABSTRACT

One reason why curriculum planning has received so much attention but generated so little practical activity is the inadequate grasp of the arts of perception--the arts which enable curriculum developers to see and make use of the significant and particular features of problematic situations. The four kinds of practical arts are: perception (list the symptoms which indicate something is wrong); problemation (formulate the problem); prescription (generate a plan of action); and commitment (take action). Perceptions are enhanced when guided by systematic use of the four commonplaces of educational situations--student, teacher, subject matter, and milieus. A checklist including details from all four factors should be used by curriculum planners, a proper balance must be maintained among the commonplaces, and interaction among the commonplaces should be encouraged when making curricular decisions. Curricular descriptions generalities must be imbued with particular characteristics, a process which considerably modifies their meaning. Deliberation is the pattern which should be used for curriculum development. Activities which would encourage curriculum planning include reading and analyzing accounts of actual deliberations and developing sets of commonplaces and mediating terms. (RM)

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PERCEPTION AND THE PRACTICAL ARTS

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ABSTRACT

Why is it that the concept of curriculum deliberation has received so much attention but generated so little practical activity? Schwab, in his series of "practical" papers (1970, 1971, 1973), and Reid, in a further explication (1979), have given us an account of the complex discipline of the practical and its method of deliberation. Yet this account seems to have encouraged a flight upward from discourse about the reasoned construction or reconstruction of curricula to discourse about "curriculum". This symptom is so marked that there must be some real difficulties in grasping and using the concept, difficulties which tend to keep the discussion up in the air.

This paper examines one possible source of difficulty, an inadequate grasp of the arts of perception, the arts which enable curriculum workers to see and make use of the significant and particular features of problematic situations. It gives a more detailed account of the arts of perception. Part II gives an overview of all the practical arts in order to put the subsequent discussion in perspective. Part III describes the arts of perception in more detail. Part IV argues that perceptions are enhanced when guided by systematic use of the four commonplaces of educational situations (student, teacher, subject matter, and milieus). Three aspects of this process are crucial: developing sufficient scope in order to escape triviality; maintaining balance so that no commonplace receives undue emphasis; and promoting interaction amongst commonplaces in order to encourage movement towards particulars. Part V examines this movement which turns commonplaces into particular places. It can be encouraged in at least three ways: differentiating a variety of student groups; inventing typologies to classify particulars; and specifying the concrete meaning of generalities. The discussion is grounded throughout in data taken from student deliberations as well as in accounts of deliberation which are in the published literature, thus illustrating failures in perception as well as its proper role in deliberation. Finally, Part VI proposes some ways in which discussions of the practical could be redirected so that its methods might become more accessible to its potential users.

I. INTRODUCTION

Why is it that the concept of curriculum deliberation has received so much attention but generated so little practical activity? Schwab, in his series of "practical" papers (1970, 1971, 1973), and Reid, in a further explication (1979), have given us an account of the complex discipline of the practical and its method of deliberation. Yet this account seems to have encouraged a flight upward from discourse about the reasoned construction or reconstruction of curricula to discourse about "curriculum". This symptom is so marked that there must be some real difficulties in grasping and using the concept, difficulties which tend to keep the discussion up in the air.

This paper examines one possible source of difficulty, an inadequate grasp of the arts of perception. These are arts which enable curriculum workers to see and make use of the significant and particular features of problematic situations. Although the ability to discriminate and give meaning to details is a crucial aspect of effective deliberation, it has received scant attention in the literature on the practical. Schwab distinguishes two arts of perception ("deliberately irrelevant scanning" and "immediate perception") but gives them only brief mention, perhaps because they are intimately connected to the other practical and eclectic arts. Yet his discussion of eclectic arts is pitched at a general level which makes it difficult for a reader to see the appropriate connections. It also uses terms, both explicitly and implicitly, which may be unfamiliar to its potential audience.

This paper seeks to overcome some of these difficulties by

giving a more detailed account of the arts of perception. Part II gives an overview of all the practical arts in order to put the subsequent discussion in perspective. Part III describes the arts of perception in more detail. Part IV argues that perceptions are enhanced when guided by systematic use of the four commonplaces of educational situations (student, teacher, subject matter, and milieu). Three aspects of this process are crucial: developing sufficient scope in order to escape triviality; maintaining balance so that no commonplace receives undue emphasis; and promoting interaction amongst commonplaces in order to encourage movement towards particulars. Part V examines this movement which turns commonplaces into particular places. It can be encouraged in at least three ways: differentiating a variety of student groups; inventing typologies to classify particulars; and specifying the concrete meaning of generalities. The discussion is grounded throughout in data taken from student deliberations as well as in accounts of deliberation which are in the published literature, thus illustrating failures in perception as well as its proper role in deliberation. Finally, Part VI proposes some ways in which discussions of the practical could be redirected so that its methods might become more accessible to its potential users.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICAL ARTS

In order to put the discussion of the arts of perception into context, let us start with an overview of all the practical arts. Schwab has not given us a systematic treatment of these arts, having left them "for discussion on another occasion" (Schwab, 1971: 498); but he has given us some clear indications of their nature and extent. Since this material occurs in various places and sometimes uses a variety of terms, it will be helpful to pull it together. One caveat is in order. Such an enterprise runs a serious risk of oversimplification. In what follows, deliberation is presented as a series of tasks to be undertaken. While this may be a useful, even necessary, device for discussing the process, we shall later see that there are a number of complications. Not only are the practical arts "onerous and complex" (Schwab, 1970: 29), they are also arts. As such, "although they can be described and exemplified, they cannot be reduced to generally applicable rules." (Schwab, 1971: 495)

Curriculum planning involves us in making decisions about what and how to teach particular groups of students at a specific time and place in concrete circumstances. Theory alone, even theory which has been analyzed and modified by proper use of the eclectic arts, cannot determine these decisions. Nor can general policies, guidelines, or models tell us, by themselves, what should be done. We must somehow come to grips with the concrete and particular features of the situation under consideration, determine their significance, choose which we will take to be relevant and which to ignore, and formulate a plan of action which

takes them into account. The practical arts are the means by which these things are accomplished.

For present purposes, we can distinguish four kinds of practical arts, although Schwab indicates that there are others (1971: 498). Arts of perception help us to see and give meaning to the details of the situation, details which are rich, variable, and particular. Arts of problemation further refine the meanings of these details so that we can decide what features of the situation need correction. We use them to turn a problematic situation into a situation of problems. Arts of prescription enable us to generate alternative plans of action which we hope will help us to resolve the problem, or problems, chosen for amelioration. Arts of commitment are the means by which we determine the likely outcomes of our proposed solutions and, eventually, decide when to stop deliberating and take action.

Given a problematic situation rich in concrete particulars, we use the arts of perception, problemation, prescription, and commitment to perform certain tasks. These tasks can be indicated schematically (although such an outline must be handled with care):

Perception

List the symptoms which indicate something is wrong.
Describe the details which are relevant.

Problematation

Make a diagnosis of what is going wrong and why.
Formulate the problem which will require attention.

Prescription

Inventory the resources and constraints.
Generate a plan of action to resolve the problem.

Commitment

Rehearse the consequences of the proposed action.
Terminate deliberation and take action.

Each task is associated with an identifiable product (e.g. a list of symptoms, a description) which could be written down. These products could then be arranged into a coherent argument in support of the action to be taken. In fact, without such an argument, which should spell out the alternatives considered as well as the reasons for choice, the plan would be of limited practical utility. It would give no guidance in adapting to changing or unforeseen circumstances.

While this summary of the practical arts may adequately describe the outcome of deliberation (a decision to act based on due consideration of the problematic character of a particular situation), it does distort the method. If read in the context of the practical papers, this need not be serious. Schwab has warned us about the complexity of the method. Even so, three complications largely omitted in the above account deserve brief mention here lest they be overlooked altogether.

First, little has been said about the arts of reflexive criticism; that is, about the means by which we exercise our capacity to perceive and alter our own preconceptions. Depending on our orientation, we often think we "know" where the problems lie. Parents blame teachers; teachers blame administrators; administrators blame parents (or, if they conceive the curriculum problem to be a political problem, they play one group against the other). All three groups may blame the students while students may blame the materials being used in teaching. We all have our favorite scapegoats for why things may be going wrong and tend to look to these while ignoring other possibilities. Reflexive criticism can help us to overcome these tendencies.

Second, the schematic outline uses singular nouns where plurals would be more accurate. Deliberation is essentially a systematic method for formulating and entertaining an adequate variety of alternatives, alternative perceptions, alternative problems, and alternative solutions. Therefore, we must develop several descriptions, consider more than one possible diagnosis, and define not one problem but several. Then we must weigh our various formulations, perhaps combining their most salient and compatible features; and eventually we must choose amongst them. This inevitably involves us in review and revision of earlier formulations.

Finally and as a consequence, the process is not at all the linear affair it has been made to seem. Schwab is quite explicit about the "interplay of ends and means, of problem, data, and solution." (Schwab, 1970: 5) But this interplay may not be obvious, especially if one focuses too much attention on the schematic outline. For example, we do not formulate the problem *before* we conceive solutions. Instead, solutions should be "anticipatory and not await the emergence of the problem." (Schwab, 1970: 34) Problems and solutions modify one another as our conceptions of them interact. Too early commitment to either would foreclose alternatives worthy of consideration. Similarly, rehearsal involves us in reconsideration, not just of solutions but also of problem formulations and the way we have assigned meanings to details. We inevitably skip from task to task so that our alternatives interact and enhance one another.

III. THE ARTS OF PERCEPTION

We now return to the arts of perception to take a closer look at the way in which they operate. It should be kept in mind, however, that much of what is said here about perception also applies to the other practical arts. Just as practical arts and eclectic arts commingle, so the arts of perception commingle with the other practical arts.

Specifying Symptoms

Curriculum problems originate in a situation which is felt to be functioning improperly. Without this sense of dissatisfaction, the situation would not be problematic and presumably would not be the occasion for deliberation. To come to grips with the situation, it is necessary to focus on these dissatisfactions in order to identify the symptoms which indicate that something is wrong or at least not going as well as we think it should. Suppose, for example, that we are concerned with a particular eighth grade class (or even all the eighth grades in a particular district). Reading scores may be below the norm or not as far above the norm as desired. Even if reading scores are within acceptable norms, there may be signs of misunderstanding or impulsiveness not picked up by the tests. Or we may simply be troubled by the fact that students do not choose to read when they have the opportunity to do so. People vary in the kinds of things which trouble them and in their sensitivity to what is troubling in a situation. Nevertheless, for everyone deliberation requires us to identify as specifically as we can those "behaviors, misbehaviors, or non-behaviors of students" which make the

situation problematic. (Schwab, 1970: 32)

For most people, this is not an easy task because they have no training in observing and describing symptoms. In fact, some people seem to have been trained to ignore symptoms. Notice that we must look at students and observe what they are doing as well as what they fail to do. Teacher, parent, or administrator behavior may eventually implicate curricular problem but are not, by themselves, curricular symptoms. Notice too that we observe particular students, not students in general. This means we must be familiar with them or, at a minimum, have access to considerable data about them. Someone must have taken the time to make a detailed and sensitive study of their behaviors, misbehaviors, and non-behaviors. Having observed, we must describe the symptoms, avoiding normative terms and, insofar as possible, disentangling the symptoms from presumed causes and preferred solutions. All of this requires considerable skill and insight.

As an example of what is involved, let us look at what one teacher did when asked to identify symptoms of her dissatisfaction:

The constant movement in my class makes it seem as if we are taking a ride on a train. As the conductor, I must stop at each station just long enough for the passengers to get on and off. I must constantly watch the clock. It's almost time for music; should I begin this project? The poetry class is due in the library now. Will I have enough time to take the students to the washroom before gym? The bilingual students must go to their bilingual class in ten minutes. They seldom complete a social studies assignment. How can I give them a grade if they are never here? Seldom do we have enough sustained, quiet, uninterrupted time to complete a task within the allotted time. It must always be finished tomorrow because it is always time to go somewhere. The school schedule requires us to be in constant motion.

This is an articulate description of a teacher's discomfort, one that might be shared by many other third grade teachers. It gives details about a particular situation. Certainly any prescription for this situation must take account of these details, including the teacher's feelings. Yet it fails as a specification of curricular symptoms in three typical ways. Most obvious, it does not tell us much about student behavior, concentrating instead on the school schedule. We really cannot tell whether students thrive under this regimen or whether their growth is being stunted. Second, symptoms, cause, and cure are all entangled. Clearly, this teacher thinks the problem lies with the school schedule, recently altered by an unpopular administrator, and is convinced that it should be changed. Third, as later evidence confirms, she is really working on a political problem. Since she already knows the solution, she has to figure out how to marshal support from teachers and parents in order to force the principal to change the schedule. Although curricular change involves such problems, they should not be confused with curricular problems. For one thing, a sound curricular argument can help to solve the political problem. For another, we are easily distracted from the real business of education.

Our third grade teacher has to have her attention focused on her students. Like many people engaging in deliberation for the first time, she may not (and, in fact did not) do this willingly. And when people do focus their attention on what students do or fail to do, their perceptions often are severely limited, both by their habitual categories as well as by their preconceptions about

what "the" problem is. Overcoming this resistance and broadening their perceptions are not easy tasks, although some ways of doing them have previously been described (Pereira, 1981). For present purposes, suffice it to point to the difficulties. If the first step in deliberation so quickly runs into trouble, it may seem less surprising, that there have been so few reports of deliberative activity.

Specifying symptoms may appear to resemble conventional "needs assessment", a term which seems to be returning to favor (Pratt, 1980; Oliva, 1982). The resemblance seems particularly close if need is defined as a gap in results between "what is" and "what should be". (Kaufman, 1983) Symptoms are part of "what is", and they trouble us because we sense a gap. However, the nature of the gap may not be immediately clear. How do we know what "should be" without a more careful look at the entire situation? "Gaps", like problems, do not come wearing their labels around their necks. Consider the following description (taken from a student deliberation) of the symptoms displayed by part of a kindergarden class:

This same group of children (about one-third of the class) do not pay much attention to books and pictures. When these are discussed during language and story time, they fidget, poke their neighbors, and are easily distracted. They do not volunteer verbal responses, and, when asked, they seem unable to label objects or actions. Almost none of these children choose to read books or to look at pictures or children's magazines in the reading corner. Yet during free time, when they usually choose to play in the house corner, they talk freely with each other using a variety of nouns to label objects and actions. They attend to what they are doing without disturbing other children and voluntarily respond to the teacher.

Something certainly seems awry, but the "need" is not clear.

It is tempting to identify the gap between their typical response to written words and pictures (inattention and incomprehension) and the response we think they should have (attention and comprehension). But how do we know they "ought" to attend and comprehend at this age in these circumstances? Looked at from another point of view, the relevant gap might lie between what we expect and what we ought to expect, thus suggesting the simple solution of changing our expectations for their behavior. Or perhaps we should focus on the gap between their prior experiences with language and the experiences they ought to have had in order to profit from the method of instruction being used. This gap suggests that "language and story time" should be arranged quite differently, a suggestion which ultimately pointed the way to a resolution of these particular difficulties.

Deliberation requires that there be an interplay between our perceptions of what is and our eventual formulation of the problem, an interplay often overlooked. By asking us to specifying a "gap" at the outset, needs assessment inhibits this interplay and encourages premature closure. In deliberation we grope our way towards a problem by assessing the current status of what students are doing, seeing this behavior in its context and making preliminary formulations. Symptoms should be related to each other, seen in the light of possible problems, and then reevaluated to see if they are as troubling as they at first seemed. In this way, the first task of deliberation, specifying symptoms, merges into the next, analyzing the situation.

Situation Analysis

Once the symptoms have been specified; and tentatively set down, we need to uncover the reasons for the dissatisfying state of affairs. These reasons cannot be found in theoretical abstractions or even in the quasi-theoretical pronouncements of people familiar with similar situations. They must be sought in "the richly endowed and variable particulars" of the situation we are trying to improve. (ISchwab, 1971: 496) Herein lies the next difficulty of the arts of perception. Because these particularities are so rich and so varied, their perception is neither simple nor straightforward. We cannot know in advance which will be relevant and which to ignore. Are reading difficulties related to students' physical development, to the duration and timing of instruction, to the teacher's behavior, or to the text series being used? We cannot even be sure of the boundaries of the problematic situation. The reasons for low reading scores may be sought within a reading group, within the classroom walls, within the school, or within some larger context. Add to these difficulties the well-documented human tendency to see only what we want to see or what we think we ought to see, and it seems clear that we ought to carefully analyze the situation before fastening too quickly on "the" reason for our dissatisfaction.

The second step in deliberation, then, requires us to describe the situation in hand. We must look at all the factors in the situation, taking note of all the details which could be relevant. When doing, this we have to overcome our natural tendencies to ignore some things and attend more closely to

others, a task made harder by our deeply felt notions about what is, or should be, important. We must decide what to look for and base our decision on what, specifically, is relevant rather than on our preconceptions. Are there systematic ways to guide this process?

Many accounts of curriculum development urge us to start with a study of the situation for which plans are being developed. Perhaps they could provide some clues. Saylor and Alexander tell us to collect "data essential for planning" which are then used throughout the subsequent process (1974: 102ff). Tyler advocates "primary analysis", an early step in curriculum development designed to "examine and analyze significant conditions that influence the construction and operation of the curriculum." (1975: 18) Nicholls and Nicholls argue for "situation analysis"; that is, "an analysis of all the factors which make up the total situation followed by the use of the knowledge and insights derived from this analysis in curriculum planning." (1978: 21)

In all three cases, we are being asked to uncover the relevant details as a basis for planning. It is instructive to compare these accounts to see what each views as potentially relevant. Saylor and Alexander identify four primary "determiners" of the curriculum: students, society, the learning process, and knowledge. They list possible sources of data on each factor, most of a highly general or theoretical type (such as census data about family structure or research studies about the nature of learning). Their treatment of students and society is quite extensive; their treatment of subject matter is especially skimpy. Tyler suggests we examine three facets of the situation

in order to get "a clearer picture of the requirements the curriculum will have to satisfy" (1975: 24): students, educational environments, and teachers. A fourth factor, subject matter, is present by implication, particularly if one views this article as an extension of his earlier rationale (1950). He has given a persuasive argument for the addition of a study of teachers to his earlier list. Although Tyler does not give details about the nature of the data sought, he appears to be suggesting data which are fairly specific (e.g. teachers' actual feelings about teaching). Nicholls and Nicholls suggest five factors: the teacher, the pupils, the environment, the school building, and the school climate. They clearly are talking about highly specific data relating to a single school. They also admit the possibility of other factors which teachers might think were of particular importance in their own situations. (1978: 30)

Clearly there are similarities in these accounts as well as differences. All three require us to study the learner. The first two include a study of subject matter although ways of looking at this factor seem fairly limited. The last two include a study of the teachers who are to implement curriculum plans, a factor generally omitted by curriculum writers. All three include educational environments although in different ways. Saylor and Alexander focus on environments outside the school by suggesting a wide variety of social and cultural features of the larger society. Nicholls and Nicholls focus primarily on internal factors by stressing the importance of the school building and the school climate. Tyler suggests the widest meaning of the term by referring to both internal and external environments.

By focusing on these similarities, and comparing them with other accounts, we could come up with a master list of relevant factors. We already have four: learners, teachers, subject matters, and educational environments (broadly conceived). There is one additional factor identified in only one account: the learning process. We could include it, but in this case we would want to include other processes such as the teaching process. However, to do so would involve us in logical difficulties, chief among which is what Daniels calls "process-product ambiguity" (1975: 250). Let us avoid this difficulty by regarding both teaching and learning processes as interactions by means of which the four factors so far identified affect each other. As to whether there are factors not so far identified, we shall approach this question from another point of view in the next section of this paper.

IV. THE USE OF COMMONPLACES

The difficulty of perception stems from the need to see particulars which, as has been said, are richly endowed and variable. Which details form the background and which should be brought forward? What can we afford to ignore and what requires careful attention? How can we be sure that we have seen all that needs to be seen? There are, of course, no purely theoretical grounds for answering these questions. Nor would it be adequate to depend solely on our untutored intuitions which are likely to be as partial as theory. As we have seen, even some of the traditional guidelines for curriculum planning omit important factors which deserve consideration. We need systematic methods for grasping the practical significance of the particular combination of details we are observing.

We are dealing here with a philosophical problem which has a long history: the search for general ways to deal with uniqueness. Since this tradition has been explicitly related to curriculum making (Westbury: 1972), we need not examine it here. Nevertheless, one tool from this tradition is available: the systematic use of commonplaces. Commonplaces are a set of extremely general terms used for grouping relevant material and guiding our investigation of some subject. They denote the places where we look for ideas; and, if we aim to cover the ground thoroughly, we look in all of these places. The spatial analogy is deliberate. In our case, we are trying to locate the details in their hiding places. A map of the terrain showing a coordinate system would be of great assistance in our search. In a sense,

commonplaces provide us with such a coordinate system.

Educational Commonplaces

What, then, are the commonplaces of education? That is, what are the things which are inevitably implicated if we wish to understand and change the situation? In its most general form, the answer is both simple to state and familiar. Someone (a *teacher*) aims to teach something (a *subject matter*) to someone (a *learner*) in a network of social and cultural environments (*milieus*). Every educational situation involves all four factors even though we sometimes forget to consider them all. To ignore any one of them constitutes a failure in perception.

These four factors were first proposed as commonplaces of education by Schwab in the course of an Inglis lecture on the teaching of science. He refers to them as "desiderata which properly determine the curriculum." (1964: 32) They are forces which are logically implicated in every educational situation. They are also forces which are controllable. "Hence, when studied and considered, they provide the means by which curriculum can be planned and, eventually, developed as planned." (1964: 32) Schwab also discusses these four commonplaces in the third practical paper (1973) where he uses them in several ways, most obviously to define the kinds of expertise which must be represented in any curriculum planning group.

When they first read about educational commonplaces, many people see them as empty and therefore of little practical utility. This is, in fact, half true. The commonplaces are empty. That is why they are ~~common~~places rather than

simply places. They achieve their generality by emptying themselves of content so they are available for use in all educational circumstances. But this is not to say that they are of little practical value. Like coordinates, they help us to locate specifics. In so doing, we turn commonplaces into particular places.

Perhaps people are misled by everyday language where the commonplace is the trite. More likely, the uses of commonplaces are not easily understood. The philosophical tradition itself, as Perelman points out, has degenerated as commonplaces have been applied in increasingly trivial ways. "Because the application is made to a frequently treated subject, developed in a certain order, with expected connections between the *loci*, we notice only its banality and fail to appreciate its argumentative value." (1969: 84) Since educational commonplaces are certainly applied to a frequently treated subject, often in a fixed order with stereotypical connections between concepts, small wonder they sometimes seem banal. Let us look more carefully at these difficulties.

Developing Scope

The first and simplest way in which commonplaces can serve to guide perception is as a kind of checklist. If we have not included details from all four factors in our description, then we know we have omitted something that must be considered. Though obvious, this principle is easily forgotten or ignored. One only has to listen to a group of teachers or parents (or curriculum workers caught off guard) discuss a problematic situation to see it happen. Even curriculum specialists can overlook the point!

witness the examples already given or the bandwagon curriculums to which Schwab points (1973: 509). It is always instructive to classify the outcomes of deliberation and analyze the extent to which each commonplace has been adequately represented.

Clearly, one of the easiest ways to slip into banality would be to have a limited view of what each commonplace entails. An adequate description must do more than touch every base. Each must be explored in depth. Yet many people, when using educational commonplaces for the first time, have no idea of their extent. "Learners" and "teacher" may fare relatively well since perceptions of people are usually fairly detailed, though they may be limited in other ways. We tend to believe that people are complex entities whose traits need careful examination. So, by playing one detail against another, a curriculum specialist can encourage the development of a comprehensive picture of the participants in the situation. "Subject matter" and "milieu" are a different matter. Neophytes in deliberation tend to see them as fixed and easily specified, and thus they have little to say about them.

Say, for example, a fifth grade teacher is asked what she teaches during the first part of the morning. The answer, as likely as not, would be "reading". This puts a label on the subject matter, but how is "reading" conceived? Our teacher might reply by naming the authors or publisher of the reading program being used. But what conception of the reading process do they purvey? "Well," she might reply, "they recommend a great deal of rapid fire question and answer work with small groups." This teacher seems to be saying that reading is reading; we all know

what it is although there may be different methods for teaching it. She has a hard time grasping the fact that these methods derive, in part, from different conceptions of the subject matter (e.g. reading as an accumulation of specific skills, reading as an understanding of grammar and syntax, reading as an organic process, ...). The same sort of impasse might have resulted had the teacher taught "math" during the first part of the morning. There are different conceptions of "math" implicit in the textbooks and in the practices of fifth grade teachers. For example, math can be viewed as a collection of techniques, as a structure governed by a few basic principles, as an activity, or as a set of abstractions from physical experience. This variety offers teachers and curriculum makers a choice, not only of descriptions but of possible solutions as well.

Take another example. Suppose that we are teaching English literature in eleventh grade. Suppose further, as Siegel (1975) did, that we have decided, for one reason or another, that Hamlet will be one of the works to be read. Although this obviously limits the potential subject matter in some ways, it still presents us with some choices. There is more than one way to read any play, Hamlet more than most since it has been the object of intensive literary analysis and debate. What are these choices and how diverse are they? Siegel's answer would, one suspects, astonish most eleventh grade English teachers. After an extensive analysis of the critical literature on Hamlet as well as of Hamlet itself, she identifies no less than 101 different ways it could be read, each of which could lead to a different kind of Hamlet curriculum. These 101

were narrowed down - first to 47, then to 24, then to 12, to 7, and eventually to 4 - based on considerations derived from all the commonplaces. These four were further developed, embodied in specific materials and proposals, and possible consequences of each were rehearsed. Finally, one was chosen as most desirable for the particular students and in view of the specific circumstances which had been previously described. Not only does this study illustrate the complexity of "subject matter", it nicely illustrates the use of the concept in curricular deliberation.

"Milieus" is an even more complex term which is even easier to oversimplify. While there are a variety of possible views of any subject matter, we usually settle on one (or at most a few) in a specific curriculum plan. But any educational situation involves a large number of milieus, each of which could be viewed in a variety of ways. Schwab refers to them as "nesting one within another like Chinese boxes" (1973: 503), a metaphor which suggests increasing inclusiveness as one goes from reading group, to classroom group, to school, to neighborhood, to town or city, and so on to a world or even universal community. Milieus also overlap. Even within the school, an individual learner may be part of a clique, an athletic team, and several classroom groups which have their own intermingled sub-groups. Add to this his membership in collectives outside the school - a scout troop, a family, a church, a social class, a race, a "culture" - and it becomes clear that learners are embedded in a complex network of milieus. So are teachers; in addition to the kinds of groups already mentioned, there are administrative, professional,

intellectual and political milieus. Some of these may be of little relevance in any one situation, but we cannot tell in advance. None can be dismissed on a priori grounds.

This complexity makes clear that we have not solved the problem of perception merely by pointing out the four commonplaces of education. Since each commonplace, not just milieus, implicates a wide variety of details, we still need methods for making sure that we have seen all that needs to be seen. One promising approach would be to develop further commonplaces for each commonplace; that is, to spell out the factors which are inevitably entailed by each. Later we shall return to this possibility.

Maintaining Balance

If used as a checklist, the commonplaces of education help to ensure that important factors are not omitted from consideration. But we must also be sure to maintain a proper balance amongst the commonplaces. No one is logically more, or less, important than the others. If one begins to dominate the others, perception will be distorted and deliberation is likely to be inadequate. Schwab has been especially clear about what proper balance means:

"Coordination, not superordination-subordination is the proper relation of these four commonplaces." (1973: 509) And he was quite clear about the dangers of tipping the balance; for example, in favor of the learner as might happen with a "child-centered" curriculum. (1973: 509-511)

Yet any deliberation must start somewhere; and, as Siegel notes, once started there is a tendency for the starting point "to exert its own force with the result that the other commonplaces

are restricted." (1975: 6) If we initiate deliberation, say, by considering the capabilities, attitudes, and personalities of teachers, the conceptions which we form will limit the kind of subject matter alternatives which we can envision. Assumptions are easily built into deliberation as beliefs coalesce into what Walker (1971) calls a "platform" for deliberation. There is no escaping this; nor should we try unless we hope to postpone action indefinitely. It is, however, essential that "considerations from the remaining commonplaces are weighted heavily against the considerations provided by the initial generative commonplace." (Siegel, 1975: 7) In her study, Siegel started with subject matter (i.e. Hamlet) but balanced this potential distortion against detailed analyses of the other three commonplaces.

Although each commonplace is logically of equal rank, there may well be particular circumstances where one should take precedence over the others; or where one should take a backseat to the others. Such circumstances are especially likely to arise when it is necessary to correct a situation in which one commonplace has not received enough attention. Scheffler (1960) provides an interesting analysis of this possibility in his discussion of the function of educational slogans. There are times when the slogan, "I teach students not subjects" has a useful purpose even though it cannot be taken literally. It can help to redress the balance, to correct the distortions caused by adherence to the counter slogan, "I teach subjects not students." We must, of course, watch out that the pendulum does not carry us with it as it swings back towards an equal and opposite excess.

There are at least two examples of willful and defensible

subordination in the literature on deliberation. Roby's description of deliberation at Central College clearly makes the student the dominant consideration. Teacher and subject matter were introduced as secondary considerations. This subordination was deliberately done to reverse the prior overemphasis on the skills and knowledges of the subject matter and on the middle class milieus of the teachers. It was also defended on the grounds that "at Central College the student component had been in the background so long that one had to bring it to the fore just to see it clearly." (Roby, 1978: 115) Schwab has provided a second example. On the occasion when he introduced the commonplaces of education, he used them to argue for a change in the conception of science from a dogmatic to an enquiring mode. The argument is made on the basis of subject matter considerations with the learner and the teacher in the background and the milieus very much in the foreground. "In our time, however, the reasons which are most urgent and compelling stem from the milieu." (1964: 37) The circumstances which compelled this superordination concerned the need for scientists, for competent political leaders, and for an informed public.

In the same article, Schwab makes a useful distinction which explains this apparent contradiction. Each commonplace has two facets, which he calls "perennials" and "ephemerals". Perennials are characteristics which we take to be inherent properties of the object being considered. Ephemerals, as the name suggests, are transient, temporary conditions. Consideration of perennials leads to practices which are intended to be relatively permanent. Ephemerals, on the other hand, lead to practices "which are

necessarily ephemeral - subject to change as their ephemeral determiners change." (1964: 35) There are, in other words, circumstances which may justify a temporary imbalance. This imbalance is only justifiable if we take steps to restore the balance when, as is inevitable, the mitigating circumstances change.

Promoting Interaction

Commonplaces can be especially useful in the course of discussion and debate. Deliberation, as Walker (1969) clearly documents, can seem chaotic as discussion moves from topic to topic. Someone in the group, most likely the curriculum specialist, must keep track of these meanderings, then guide the discussion towards omitted factors. Even in the heat of the moment, commonplaces can be used to monitor and direct what is going on. This is, of course, a tricky operation. Once launched along a line of thinking, people are not easily redirected. As Schwab points out, the curriculum specialist must have considerable influence to convince people to honor other points of view. It also requires a habit of analyzing the key terms in which ideas are expressed, one of the outcomes of training in the eclectic arts.

Fox (1972) has provided a brief yet telling example, in the form of a transcript with commentary, of how deliberation can be guided by a curriculum specialist who has a grasp of educational commonplaces. An experimental unit in botany is under discussion. A teacher presents evidence of a disturbing symptom: students are bored. A subject matter specialist immediately produces some novel yet plausible reasons why the subject matter might be

boring. This initiates a relatively lengthy consideration of various views of subject matter which the curriculum specialist deliberately encourages. When several new subject matter options have been tentatively put forward, the curriculum specialist invites comments from the psychologist who, as the expert on learners, has so far remained silent. Even though the scientist has just introduced some speculations about learners, the psychologist continues the discussion of subject matter. The curriculum specialist firmly closes off this "digression" because he judges it time to focus on the learners. After some interchange between psychologist and scientist, a new emphasis for the unit is articulated, and its feasibility is supported by the teacher. Although the transcript ends at this point, presumably the curriculum specialist made sure that symptoms and possible solutions were viewed in the light of the various milieus and, to the extent not so far done, in the light of conceptions of the teachers.

This transcript nicely illustrates another, more important, aspect of the way commonplaces function in deliberation. As the scientist and psychologist interact, their ideas are modified and enriched. The psychologist develops a new view of what botany is about, and the scientist develops a new view of learners. Moreover, each gets a new view of his own area of expertise by seeing it in relation to other considerations (although in this particular excerpt the scientist tends to assimilate new views to the ideas he has already expressed). In other words, deliberation not only plans educational experiences for others, it becomes educative for its participants.

We can put the matter more precisely. As conceptions of subject matter and conceptions of learners interact, each is modified in a way that would not happen were the commonplaces considered separately. This starts the transition from commonplaces to particular places. For example, this transcript suggests at least five conceptions of what botany is: a study of plant life, a collection of facts and ideas about plant life, a set of methods for studying plant life, a "story" of enquiries into plant life, and an account of the vicissitudes of botanists. Given that "plant life" has been adequately discriminated from other kinds of life, these are logical possibilities each of which has potential as a curricular resource and which, taken together, fairly well cover the ground. Yet they are still abstract possibilities. Deliberation starts to give them life by relating them to other abstract possibilities derived from other commonplaces. In this case, the transcript suggests at least three characteristics of students: they are naturally attracted to moving things; they seek security, often finding it in "right" answers; and they have a drive to identify with adults, particularly adults engaged in meaningful work. While not covering the ground as thoroughly, these characteristics are sufficiently provocative to suggest a solution. When the last characteristic of learners is seen next to the last possibility for botany, a way for making botany less boring is glimpsed.

But so far only glimpsed. More work needs to be done. For one thing, more conceptions of the learner as well as of the other commonplaces should be explored. Then conceptions from each commonplace need to be related to conceptions from all the others.

For another, a concurrent movement towards the particular has to be made, a movement acknowledged in the transcript by the curriculum specialist when he sets the task for their next meeting: "Do you think it would be too much to ask the two of you (scientist and teacher) to prepare for our next meeting one or two examples ... where the student might identify with a scientist struggling with a problem?" (Fox, 1972: 56) By asking each to make their notions more specific, the curriculum specialist encourages them to come to grips with particulars in the situation where students find botany boring. We can anticipate that when the two examples are seen side by side, the scientist will worry about specific distortions of botany in the teacher's example and the teacher will worry about specific characteristics of students (or perhaps teachers) which have been overlooked by the scientist. Thus a movement towards the particular has been initiated.

V. TOWARDS PARTICULAR PLACES

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The move towards the particular is not as easily accomplished as one might think. Particulars are messy, disorganized, and confusing. Consequently there is a natural tendency to avoid them by looking for principles, generalizations, and abstract categories. This tendency is, of course, especially noticeable amongst academics and others who are accustomed to theoretical activity. The more we work with abstractions, the more comfortable we feel with them and the more we appreciate their power. Yet many teachers and curriculum workers exhibit a similar tendency even when they are not comfortable with theory.

Consider the following description of some particular students written by their teacher:

These students are all girls. They come from the suburbs, the city, and the inner city. Their ability ranges from poor to excellent. All ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds are represented. Their economic backgrounds are also varied. Ten of them have little facility with English. They are generally self motivated with good parental support. Fifty-six percent of the graduates of this school go on to college. All in all they are a very conservative group.

This teacher should know this group intimately having taught them over the course of an entire academic year, but what has she told us about her *particular* students? They are a varied group! but we have not learned much else. Judging from the way she talks about her students, she seems to be concerned about them and to know them well. Yet her written description is a pale shadow of her talk. There are many reasons which might account for this: she may be overwhelmed by details, she may have difficulty finding words to express herself, she may think this was what was

expected. Whatever the reason, it seems that she has robbed these students of their concreteness and idiosyncracies.

The theft has occurred in three characteristic ways which it is instructive to examine. First, individuals are treated as part of a collective rather than as individuals. Almost all of the statements are about the classroom group taken as a whole. Even the two exceptions are statements about collectives (i.e. "ten of them" and "graduates of this school"). Second, collective characteristics are treated merely as representatives of larger collectives (e.g. suburban residents, females, conservatives). It is assumed that we already know, or can find out from less specific sources, what it means to be a suburban resident. Third, the terms of the description, express or implied, are borrowed from theoretical or quasi-theoretical sources: e.g. sex, ethnicity, SES, political affiliation, college aspirations, ability, and motivation.

Now it may be argued that there is, in principle, nothing wrong with our sample description. Perhaps it is a bit thin and more specifics should be given, but can any description grasp reality in all its concreteness? Since all descriptions inevitably involve abstraction, "theft" may be too strong a word. Such an argument has, in fact, been made by Scheffler in his critique of the first two practical papers. Why, he asks, call abstraction a "vice", as Schwab does, if all thinking is abstractive? Or, to put it another way, since abstraction is not unique to theory, it cannot be the grounds for opposing the theoretical to the practical. (Scheffler, 1973: 187-190) While Scheffler seems to have misunderstood the form, and therefore the

force, of Schwab's argument, he does point to the central problem of practical description: how can we coordinate particulars with generalities and abstractions.

Differentiating Collectives

To further illustrate the extent of the problem, let us return to the ways our sample description goes wrong. In most educational situations we deal with collectives; a reading group, a class, a grade level, a school. Seldom do we have the luxury of educating people in groups of one, Rousseau and Mark Hopkins notwithstanding. We are even less likely to deliberate at length about the education of single individuals. Since we deal with students in groups, we cannot avoid generalizing about them. Even an elementary school teacher who sees the same group of thirty children all day long cannot always think about them as individuals, much as she might like to do so. More than a few who have seriously tried have ended up "burnt out" or with a nervous breakdown.

The trouble, then, with the sample description is not that students are viewed as members of groups, but that for the most part they are viewed as members of a single group, "the class". This teacher needs to distinguish a variety of subgroups within her class (e.g. those who derive satisfaction from learning, those who attack problems impulsively, those who are over anxious to please the teacher, ...). As each student is viewed as a member of this or that group, individual characteristics emerge. Betty, who belongs to groups a and b, is not the same as Cynthia, who belongs to groups a and c. What holds for classrooms holds for larger groups for whom curriculum

is being planned. We grasp particulars by seeing individuals as members of various collectives.

Most teachers do this sort of thing as a matter of course, although they sometimes try to deny it. But it often seems that their natural categories are limited or stereotypical (e.g. bright vs. dull, talkative vs. quiet, well behaved vs. poorly behaved) and therefore not adequate to catch the significant features of the situation. The process requires that we have a rich variety of alternative categories available to us because we cannot say in advance which categories will be most salient. We need to try on different ways of grouping students until we find some that fit the students and our developing sense of what the problem is.

It should be obvious by this time that we are trying to view the situation through a succession of different lenses, a process which Schwab describes as "deliberately irrelevant scanning." (1971: 497) Deliberate because a pluralistic stance is actively encouraged. Irrelevant because we choose, at times, to use lenses whose relevance may not be obvious in hopes that fresh perspectives may yield new insights. We are not trying to come up with "the" correct description; a fixed metaphysics is not the aim of the practical. Instead, we are looking for multiple descriptions which, taken together, give us a sufficiently clear picture of the situation to justify subsequent action.

Inventing Typologies

It often happens that the categories which we normally use are not adequate to capture the particulars which we sense are relevant. We want to generalize but are not happy with the way our terms fit the details of the situation. In this case we need

to invent, or borrow, organizing terms. Since our goal is to understand the situation which confronts us rather than to invent principles which generalize to other situations, we seek only limited generalizations which are accommodated to the particulars. Whether or not they can be used elsewhere is, at best, a secondary concern.

An example taken from one of the few published accounts of deliberation may help to clarify this process. Roby (1978) describes a single person deliberation involving teaching humanities at "Central College", a two year institution which had recently enrolled new types of students. The institution had, at first, continued former practices without attending to the changes. When it became obvious that something was amiss, practices were modified; but the changes were based on a set of categories for classifying students which were too limited and too abstract. They were limited because they did not capture a wide variety of detail about the students and thereby failed to point the way towards a productive solution. If disadvantaged students are portrayed as merely unskilled, unmotivated, and non-competitive, we have not identified any tendencies which can be used as a positive resource. The categories were also too abstract because they portrayed the students as mere representatives of the larger middle class collective to which it was assumed they belonged. To overcome these inadequacies, Roby developed a student typology which took account of the particular characteristics of the students as well as the fact they were members of a class and a race.

The typology distinguished two broad types of students:

militant and moderate. Moderate students hoped to "make it in the white system" despite their low level of skill. Their hopes of mobility encouraged their teachers' belief that they were potentially part of the broad middle class collective. Militant students had a different strategy. They used black power rhetoric to reject their teachers and the system. Some militants paradoxically tried to use intimidation to get better grades and thus "make it" in the system under attack. Thus the sub-divisions "dogmatic militant" for the first and "mobile militant" for the second were required. Further refinements of this typology occurred as Roby distinguished "variable students" who swung between the moderate and militant poles and "fatalistic students" who gave up the struggle and dropped out.

There are three important features of this typology which deserve special mention. First, in spite of the fact that it is both general and abstract it was developed in response to a particular problematic situation after due consideration of a wide range of particularities. It was not an application of theory to the situation, though it is possible that theory, prepared by the eclectic arts, was used. Second, to the extent it applies at all the typology only applies to the situation from which it was generated. It was never intended to be, nor should it be, used elsewhere without modification. Third, because the situation will inevitably change with time we cannot expect the typology to maintain its usefulness. In fact, as Roby points out, this typology from the late 1960's changed as in the early 1970's a new type appeared which gradually replaced the militants. Presumably this new type, whom he called "zodiac students", required a

different curricular treatment. (1978: 116)

Specifying Generalities

Because the classroom situation is embedded in a number of surrounding milieus, students are also members of larger collectives. Our sample description quite properly takes account of this by mentioning a variety of such groups. But it gives us no clue about the particular meaning of membership in any one of them. Suppose, to take an individual example, that we establish that Betty is female, Catholic, black, and an inner city resident. This might be useful information, but what is its practical significance? Without further analysis of *this* situation, we cannot know. As stated, these are abstractions divorced from particulars. Their practical import can only be found when they are related to particulars.

This brings us back to the matter of borrowing descriptive terms from theory. Such terms are not just general and abstract - we have already accepted the necessity of this. They are also designed to be applied to a wide range of situations. The wider the range the further we are from the concrete particulars to which they need to be related and the more careful we must be to develop these relationships. They may be useful in helping us grasp particularities, but we must be wary. There is a great temptation to use them to avoid these particularities. In this case, abstraction would indeed become a vice.

It is common practice to report large scale sociological or demographic data to describe the community in which a school is located. Curriculum theorists, such as Saylor and Alexander, insist upon it; so do accrediting agencies; and teachers willingly

follow suit. A community survey typically includes data on social and economic status, on religious preferences, on population trends, on ethnicity; in fact, on all the things suggested by our earlier sample description. But seldom are we told what we are supposed to do with these gross descriptors. They are not necessarily useless, but their meaning is not self evident. We cannot stop with them as is commonly done. The aim of curricular description is to promote an interaction of particular places. The generalities must be imbued with particular characteristics, a process which considerably modifies their meaning.

Siegel (1975) provides an excellent example of how this can be done. In the course of her deliberation she reports the following data (among others): the suburban community which the high school serves is 75% Jewish and 7% black; church attendance is not high; median income is over \$26,000; median age of men is 43.1 and of women 37.6; 89% of parents have been enrolled in college. In most studies these data would be reported so that we could assess the extent to which results could be generalized to other situations. Here they were treated as clues. What did it mean to be Jewish in this community? The answer is lengthy, loaded as it is with particulars, anecdotes, and first person references. What were the implications of the relatively uniform, middle class suburban environment? Stereotypes were examined and rejected because they did not fit the details. Accounts of other superficially similar situations were also examined and modified. Was the high educational level of parents of any significance? Not in the way that was anticipated. Gradually a picture of *this* community emerged which later became part of the basis

for curricular prescription. Other parts derived, of course, from a parallel analysis and specification of the other commonplaces.

VI. WHAT TO DO ABOUT "DELIBERATION"

If the above discussion has done nothing else. It has illustrated the complexity of the arts of perception. Given that these are just one of the set of practical arts and that deliberation requires eclectic arts as well, it is not surprising that there has been so little activity using the language of the practical. The concepts are hard to grasp and even harder to use. Moreover, once they are grasped and put to use, the rewards may not seem to be worth the price. For most people, deliberation is not inherently satisfying since we never can be sure whether or not it has been done well. Nor can we know about the effects of deliberation on subsequent events; apparent successes might be the result of good luck.

Nevertheless, there are some directions which could be taken if we wish the language of the practical to be more widely understood and used. Before listing them, it is worth noting the implicit assumption: deliberation is the pattern which *should* be used for curriculum development. There is, in fact, no empirical evidence that this, or any other "model", leads to improved practices. Such evidence of deliberation's successes and failures must await its wider application. Meanwhile, let us consider four activities, suggested by the preceding discussion, which would encourage this development.

Exemplars of Deliberation

One way to understand the language of the practical is to see it in use. For most people, this would mean reading accounts of actual deliberations (since observing actual deliberations would,

at this point, be an option available to a limited audience). Yet there are remarkably few accounts of deliberation available, especially if one restricts attention to deliberations which are organized by the concepts developed in the practical papers. Three single-person deliberations come to mind, each of which has admitted limitations if viewed as an ideal model of the practical arts in action. Siegel's deliberation on a Hamlet curriculum (1975) was partially simulated. Circumstances dictated that there would be no specific students for whom the curriculum was designed and thus neither presenting symptoms nor resulting action. Roby's deliberation at Central College (1978) was incomplete. Because time and resources were in short supply and because the symptoms were severe, the deliberation was circumscribed. Schwab's treatment of student protest (1969) was extremely general; it was intended as a discussion of generic rather than specific students. Nevertheless, as we have seen, these three accounts provide useful illustrations of the methods of the practical. More exemplars, even though they inevitably would be flawed in some respects, would help to make the methods accessible to a wider public.

Commonplaces of Commonplaces

In the discussion of educational commonplaces which was given above, it became apparent that we need sets of terms for locating the relevant features of each commonplace. In short, we need further commonplaces for each commonplace. Some efforts in this direction have been made. Getzels (1979) has analyzed the large number of meanings which could be given to the truism that the school and the community are related. He thereby suggests a set

of terms which could be used to examine the milieus which surround a school. In the course of his description of the eclectic arts, Schwab (1971) has provided an analysis of personality theories. Implicit in this account is a set of commonplaces which could help us get a handle on students and teachers. In a brief piece written more recently, he has suggested a set of terms which could help to analyze interpersonal relations (Schwab, 1974b). In a lecture to science educators, he has suggested terms which help to organize possible views of "science" (Schwab, 1974a). There are other beginnings, but as yet not enough work has been done to develop sets of commonplaces for guiding perception, an enterprise which would be a useful exercise of eclectic arts.

Sets of Mediating Terms

Perception, as has been noted, requires that we look at situations through a variety of lenses. The terms which give these lenses their power might be familiar ones; but frequently they need to be invented for the occasion or borrowed from other sources. Invention of new terms for every occasion would be arduous, if not impossible. Borrowing, as has been pointed out, can be dangerous, especially if the terms are too abstract and not related to specifics. We need sets of terms to enable us to make modest generalizations which are capable of modification and adaptation to a variety of circumstances. Such sets of terms are unlikely to come from theory which is generated from large scale quantitative research; such research is too concerned with questions of external validity. They are more likely to come from theory which has been grounded in relatively detailed consideration of the full array of factors implicated in a few

educational situations. Since this kind of research has become more fashionable than it once was, there are some good examples in the published literature. No doubt we all have our favorites! a reading of the curriculum papers delivered at the AERA meeting of 1981 (Schubert and Schubert, 1982) may suggest others. But such sets of terms need to be organized and their uses as mediating terms tested in the course of actual deliberations.

What Do Deliberators Do?

Whether we think of deliberation in the language of the practical or whether we conceive of it in other terms, there have been remarkably few analyses of actual deliberations. Walker's studies (1969, 1971) and Fox's (1972) provocative comments on snatches of deliberation are interesting exceptions. The fact is we still do not know much about what goes on when deliberation is taking place. Such studies are badly needed, complicated to organize as they may be. There is a precedent for this kind of investigation provided by Shulman and his colleagues. (Elstein, 1978) Their studies of medical problem solving showed that what clinicians actually do is not at all what was supposed. Several useful outcomes could result from similar investigations of curricular problem solving. We might find that deliberation seems to follow the pattern outlined in the practical papers even when the terms which the participants are different. Or we might find that the pattern is too complex or totally unlike what the "best" deliberators do. More likely than either of these, we might find that there are several patterns of apparently adequate deliberation, an outcome which would enrich and modify our current conceptions.

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